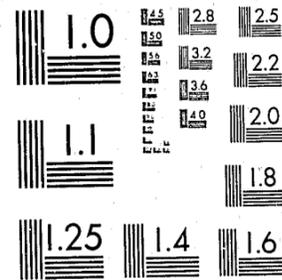


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The Juvenile Runaway Phenomenon

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William H. Webster, Director

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THE COVER: A law enforcement agency has implemented a unique program designed to deal with juvenile runaways. See article p. 1.

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Incest

The Last Taboo

(Conclusion)

Physical and Emotional Effects

In cases that involve prepuberty intercourse, the medical consequences are usually grave for the child. Some of the medical problems include rectal fissures, lacerated vaginas, death by asphyxiation, gonorrheal tonsillitis, venereal disease, and pregnancy.²⁷ Complications in childbirth increase over 50 percent for preteen mothers, causing the sexually abused child to carry a lifelong history of medical and psychological fear.²⁸

In many cases, it is not until the incestual relations have been discovered by someone outside the family that it is reported.²⁹ When incest does come to public attention, the daughter

is usually removed from the home. Since she is taken away, the child perceives the act as a punishment for having misbehaved. This causes her great anxiety, fear, anger, depression, embarrassment, and an increased sense of guilt.

After being placed in foster care, it is possible that the child may become a professional foster child and will never again be allowed to see her parents or visit home. As a result

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of this, the child becomes a threefold victim. First, she is betrayed by the very person she has been taught to obey, love, and look to for guidance. Second, she is betrayed by her mother, who fails to come to her rescue. Third, she feels betrayed by society, whom she believes has banished her. From these feelings of betrayal, the child learns to mistrust not only her father but all adults and society in general.

Ultimately, the child may become self-abusive and turn to drugs, promiscuity, or truancy. One study reported that in 500 cases of adolescent drug abusers, over 70 percent had been involved in some form of family sexual abuse. One study of adolescent female prostitutes revealed that over 75 percent had been victims of incest. It also estimated that nearly one-half of the 300,000 annual runaways in this country were sexually abused at home.³⁰

Other victims become frigid, homosexual, or bitter toward men. They may become socially isolated as they withdraw into themselves. In any case, the emotional impact of incest is far reaching.

Sometimes the psychological effects of incest cannot be seen immediately. The victim may reach adulthood before having to face the consequences of incest. As an adult, she may experience difficulty in adjusting to married life, no matter how much patience or understanding her husband shows. Essentially, the scar of incest makes it difficult for her to experience both love and passion for a man.

If single, the victim may have problems in her relationships with men. More specifically, she may become sado-masochistic as the result of her need to lash out and find revenge, as well as her desire for punishment.

Incarceration vs Treatment

When the daughter involved in a father/daughter incestuous relationship can no longer contend with the situation, she will, in desperation, go to her mother for assistance. The mother usually reacts with disbelief. If the mother does believe her daughter, she will often refuse assistance.

In many cases, the daughter will contact a friend, teacher, or school official who, in turn, will contact the police. After an investigation, the daughter is usually placed in a children's shelter.

At this point, the daughter experiences great anxiety. This may be the first time she has been away from the family; she feels alone and threatened, and the guilt and anger overwhelm her. Living in the shelter serves to reinforce her fear that she has been banished from the family. She is usually overwhelmed by mixed emotions of fear, guilt, and anger. She is firmly convinced she will not be able to rejoin her family or to face her friends and relatives. Even though she is the victim, she believes she is the one who is being punished.

Many times, the daughter turns this guilt and anger inward. She becomes self-abusive. This may be manifested through hostility, alcohol and drug abuse, or sexual promiscuity. Authorities have noted that samples of sexually promiscuous females yield a high proportion of reports of incestuous backgrounds and that sam-

"The criminal justice system has a devastating effect upon the incest family."

ples of incestuous daughters yield many cases of promiscuity.³¹

The incestuous father is usually convicted on a felony charge and given a term in prison. It is logical to assume that much of the family savings will go to pay court costs and attorney fees.

While in prison, the father is usually segregated to prevent other prisoners from harming him. He suffers many indignities and begins to loathe himself more intensely. When he is released he has difficulty finding employment, usually taking a job that is inferior to the one he had prior to incarceration.

The wife is stunned by the events. Her daughter is taken from the home, her husband into custody. Her security is gone—she now has the responsibility of providing for the entire family. She has failed as both wife and mother. Her feelings toward her daughter alternate between jealousy, hatred, and motherly concern. At first, she expresses anger and hatred toward her husband, but later realizes that on the whole, he was a good father and provider. If she cannot find employment, she must apply for welfare. Many times, there are mortgage payments and other bills that cannot be paid.

The criminal justice system has a devastating effect upon the incest family. It tends to destroy the family by separating its members, placing undue hardships on individual family members and society. Rather than being constructive, it has a negative effect on a family already weakened by serious internal problems. The father is not usually rehabilitated.

After he has served his sentence, he is free to return to the family and may commit acts of incest with another daughter. The underlying family problems are not addressed. The mother sometimes becomes a burden to society by being forced to add her family to the role of welfare recipients.

The incarceration of the father does not usually serve any useful purpose. It tends to destroy the family. The entire family is victimized and procedures should be undertaken to strengthen and support the family, not traumatize it further.

One argument for incarceration is lack of cooperation of the incestuous father in any therapeutic effort. If there is no threat of incarceration, the father will not usually participate in therapy. In many cases, the mother had already become aware that her husband was sexually exploiting a daughter and threatened to divorce him if he did not obtain psychological treatment. Offenders usually stop seeing a therapist after a few sessions. Some even resume the sexual abuse of their daughters. In some instances, the fathers continue the incestuous relationship even while undergoing psychological treatment.

The fear of incarceration motivates a father to participate in treatment programs. However, if the incarceration is for a short period of time, he may choose to endure it since it would seem less of a blow to his ego than psychotherapy.

A substantial incarceration period for incest is necessary to impress upon potential offenders the fact that sexual exploitation of a child is a crime and to motivate those who have not been discovered by authorities to seek voluntary treatment.

Even when ordered to attend therapy sessions, the incestuous father may be extremely difficult to work with in a family therapy context—he perceives it to be an embarrassing experience. Some fathers participate in the treatment program, remaining totally unreceptive, and emerge no different than before. There must be an alternative that makes the treatment program desirable. Substantial incarceration is that alternative.

Is it impossible to treat the psychopathic personality involved in incest? Unlike the symbiotic fathers who turn to sex with their daughters as a way to get human closeness and nurturing, psychopathic personalities seek stimulation, novelty, and excitement. These persons were so deprived and rejected in their own childhoods that they are driven by a strange aggressiveness and hostility, as well as a powerful need for pleasure, excitement, and stimulation. Psychopaths, or sociopaths as they are sometimes called, will use force to commit incest with their daughters—symbiotic fathers will not. Psychopathic fathers may not hesitate to abuse their children physically, as well as sexually. They have no love for their children—they are incapable of love. They have little conscience and no remorse.

Psychopaths can be persuasive and disarming, as well as abusive and brutal. It is possible that a psychopath could complete a treatment program and be completely unchanged. He could return home to again sexually

and physically abuse his wife and children. Psychopaths can be unpredictable and dangerous. They see people as objects to be used to satisfy their cravings. They would best benefit from treatment received while they are incarcerated.

Both treatment and incarceration have positive and negative features. In fathers exhibiting symbiotic personalities and willingness to cooperate with therapists, treatment appears to be the most positive solution. When the father is uncooperative or is a psychopathic personality, incarceration appears to be the most appropriate treatment.

Given two choices, the father will take the path of least resistance. If incarceration is substantial enough to be an inconvenience, he will probably volunteer for the treatment program.

One way to have a positive effect on the family is to attack the basic causes of incest through family and individual therapy. There are a number of successful programs that allow the family to survive as a viable unit.

It is most effective to deal with the family as a unit. The first step is to admit the incest. Often, at the beginning of treatment, the daughter will change her story frequently. The second adjustment to be made is regrouping the family. That is when the family openly faces the incest crisis. The final step of treatment is the acceptance of help from outsiders and from within the family. The family will then strive toward a better life and handle the adjustment. They must be made to understand that incest is wrong and a serious crime.

Treatment Programs

In spite of the well-known, harmful consequences of incest, there are few treatment resources available to incest families. Although these treatment programs may vary slightly, one thing they all have in common is they allow the father to remain employed and support the family. In addition, only in cases in which the father continues to serve as a threat to the child

or has, in the past, brought extreme harm to the child is the father separated from the family. Whether the father will enter one of these treatment programs or be incarcerated depends on his willingness to cooperate and his chances of being rehabilitated.

Success of these programs is partially illustrated by the following:

- (1) Recidivism of less than 5 percent in some programs, compared to a rate of over 85 percent for untreated offenders;
- (2) Children are returned home sooner—90 percent within the first month, eventually over 95 percent;

“ . . . as long as society remains uncaring and permissive, incest will continue to thrive.”

- (3) Self-abusive behavior of victim children reduced in both intensity and duration; and
- (4) More marriages saved, over 90 percent in some programs.³²

Most treatment programs start with individual therapy of each family member, attacking their low self-esteem. Next there is husband/wife therapy to improve the marital relationship, followed by mother/daughter therapy. Family therapy is the eventual goal.

In 1971, there were only three incest rehabilitation programs around the country. It is estimated that there are now over 200 such programs in over 15 States. Public officials and citizens should be educated to the apparent success of these incest rehabilitation and treatment programs.

One such program is Parents United, founded in 1971, which strives to meet the crime with both prosecution and treatment. It requires a report to police, police investigation, arrest, booking, and then release of the father. The person is limited with a “no contact” judicial order; he is strongly encouraged to temporarily move out of the home so the victim child may remain. To enter the program, the suspect must admit his incest and immediately attend Parents United meetings. He is ordered to start treatment as soon as possible. This will later become mandatory as part of the court order. The goal is to reconstruct the family unit by obtaining treatment for appropriate members. This objective is usually achieved within 6 months. The family will then resume living together. The father is not physically incarcerated unless he does not comply with the court order. The victim benefits from avoiding the additional trauma of court appearance and testimony against a parent.³³

Parents United now has approximately 46 chapters in over 15 States. One of their most aggressive and innovative programs is located in Santa Clara County, Calif. In the last 10 years, that chapter has provided assistance to more incest victims than any other single organization in the country. They claim that remolestation are reported in less than 5 percent of the incest cases. The rehabilitation model appears to be successful and productive.

Children attend meetings of Daughters and Sons United until they are capable of joining their parents in group sessions.

Parents Anonymous, another such program, is organized on a similar model which calls for prosecution for the offending parent when the case is severe; however, the major objective is maintaining the family unit. Parents Anonymous families also enjoy a high rate of success. One may conclude that a prosecution-ori-

Indicators of Sexual Child Abuse

Physical Appearance of Child

- 1) Has torn, stained, or bloody underclothing;
- 2) Experiences pain or itching in the genital area;
- 3) Has bruises or bleeding in external genitals, vagina, anal, or oral regions;
- 4) Has venereal disease;
- 5) Has swollen or red cervix, vulva, perineum, or anus;
- 6) Has semen about mouth, genitals, or on clothing; or
- 7) Is pregnant.

Behavior of Child

- 1) Appears withdrawn or engages in fantasy or infantile behavior;
- 2) Has poor peer relationships;
- 3) Is unwilling to participate in physical activities;
- 4) Engages in delinquent acts or runs away;
- 5) Actually states he has been sexually assaulted by a parent or caretaker.

Characteristics of Caretaker

- 1) Extremely protective or jealous of child;
- 2) Encourages child to engage in prostitution or sexual acts in the presence of caretaker;
- 3) Has been sexually abused as a child;
- 4) Is experiencing marital difficulties;
- 5) Misuses alcohol or other drugs;
- 6) Is frequently absent from the home.

Parents and authorities should be alert for these warning signs.

One or more of the following factors is usually present in an incestuous family:

- 1) Family discord;
- 2) Mental health problem;
- 3) Broken family;
- 4) Alcohol dependence;
- 5) Spouse abuse;
- 6) Insufficient income;
- 7) Social isolation;
- 8) Police court record (excluding traffic);
- 9) History of abuse as a child;
- 10) Inadequate housing;
- 11) Lack of tolerance to child's disobedience and provocation;
- 12) Loss of control during discipline;
- 13) Continuous child care;
- 14) Incapacity due to physical handicap; chronic illness;
- 15) Authoritarian method of discipline;
- 16) New baby/pregnancy;
- 17) Drug dependence; and/or
- 18) Mental retardation.

Noreen M. Grella, Supervisor, Child Protective Services, Santa Ana, Calif., Lecture at Delinquency Control Institute, University of Southern California, January 1981.

ented treatment model can be a viable solution to sexual abuse at all levels.³⁴ It is important for our officials and our communities to support these successful programs.

Conclusion

The taboo labeling of the incest act may cause more harm than good. The laws that are supposed to aid the victim may cause trauma to the child by having the victim testify against a parent. If the parent is punished, this guilt will be even worse. The child will take the blame for separation of the family and bringing shame on the family. This guilt will be compounded if the child loves the abusive parent and does not want the parent to be punished but wants the painful activity to end.

The problem will not be solved until the public is educated and made aware of certain facts. When incest is reported, the victim should generally be believed. Statistics have shown that incest reports have, for the most part, been true.

Unfortunately, as long as society remains uncaring and permissive, incest will continue to thrive. The only way it can be abolished is through public awareness and through individuals who care enough to prevent it.

FBI

Footnotes

²⁷ Supra note 20, p. 182.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Henry Giarretto, "The Treatment of Father-Daughter Incest: A Psycho-Social Approach," *Children Today*, July-August, 1976, p. 2.

³⁰ Mimi Silbert and Ayala Pines, *Child Abuse and Neglect: The International Journal*, Sexual Child Abuse as an Antecedent to Prostitution, vol. 5, No. 4, 1981.

³¹ Ibid., p. 191.

³² Ron Tunley, "Incest: Facing the Ultimate Taboo," *Reader's Digest*, January 1981, pp. 137-140.

³³ Supra note 17, pp. 191.

³⁴ Ray Heller and Henry Kemp, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1976), p. 155.

END